3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

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right to the throne. If all the sons of a king die, before it is the turn of one of them to become king, that family loses its royal prerogatives. A left-handed or otherwise deformed man cannot be crowned. When from such or a similar reason the son of a king fails to be crowned, his posterity loses the right to the throne.

[562]

As a rule only a man can be king; though once a queen reigned, she apparently did not command a great authority, vide page 149; and it is characteristic that in the lists given by Banholzer and Dr. Giffen her name is not mentioned.

[662]

The way in which the king is elected, vide page 122 ff. Of course frequently party intrigues are at work on these occasions, and it may have been not quite an uncommon occurrence that there were several candidates for the throne, supported by different factions; sometimes there were even two kings, residing in different places of the country.

POWER OF THE KING [65]

The power of the king was, previous to the British occupation, absolute; he disposed on life and death of his subjects. The subjects had to pay heavy taxes in cattle, durra, boats, skins for clothes, and under certain circumstances, in persons also.

JURISDICTION 671 693 685

All judicial cases may be brought before the king, with whom lies the final decision. They have an unwritten code of law, providing fixed penalties and fines. Cattle thieves were formerly killed on the spot by the owner of the stolen property. If the thief escaped, but was located with the stolen thing, the owner demanded it. In case the thief refused to give it up and the owner was unable to get it by force, he then reported to his chief, and if he failed there, the matter went to the king, who punished the man perhaps by taking his property and some girls from his village for himself.

681 567 [644]

In the case of certain infractions of the law the convict became the slave of the king, and could no more return to his home. These slaves are known as *tyqé orgé* ("men of crime") or *adjeg*. The king gives to such a man a wife. Their children are slaves at the royal court and are called *adjeg*. To the male descendants of such the king gives wives, and the females are taken to be given to male members of the *adjeg* class as wives. If the king does not have enough girls in the *adjeg* class to supply all the young men with wives, he buys free girls for the purpose, their descendants become also slaves.

In some cases the criminal becomes the slave of a chief; these are also called *adjeg*.

682 672

Murder cases were tried by a court of chiefs and the king. If the man was condemned, he was disgraced in many ways before the people. Sometimes he was led about the village with a cow-rope around his neck, and then executed by hanging. If a man was executed on account of a crime, his whole family

LEGAL PROCEDURE

671 According to Hofmayr, Shilluk law "...is a law of tradition based on decisions of Nyikang and of previous kings."(1) He maintains that justice is very arbitrary and depends much on individual interpretation and custom. 692 The settlement chief has a court to which are brought cases which the gol leaders and the hamlet headmen feel unable to settle or which are too serious for them to judge. The accuser and accused appear before the settlement chief and the headman is often called as witness, while the elders assist. In major disputes, or if the settlement chief's decision is appealed against, the matter is brought before the *reth*. Hofmayr further states that important cases are treated by him and his judgement is final.(2)

681 In the courts compensation is awarded for homicide and fines in cattle or goats, according to the seriousness of the offence, are imposed for disputing the *reth*'s judgement, refusing to pay royal tribute, wounding a royal prince or princess, for theft, robbery and sexual offences. Apart from minor offences it would appear that offenders were brought to court and tried, not so much for private wrongs as for public delicts or crimes coming under the general category of breaking the *reth*'s peace, disputing the *reth*'s judgement, breaking the *reth*'s and Nyikang's laws.

643 Information suggests that in practice in the past the *reth*'s judicial 692 authority was by no means undisputed. Hofmayr maintains that an order or [676] judgement of the *reth*'s court was executed by the *reth*'s bodyguard, which consisted of a number of youths who followed the king everywhere. Accord- [629] ing to the same authority "blood revenge is well known among the Shilluk and feuds do exist between persons, between families and also between villages."(3) The fine for homicide is 10 head of cattle; formerly a [682] girl was taken instead of cattle. According to both Seligman and Hofmayr, the *reth* kept the cattle but might give two or three cows to the family of the deceased as compensation. This practice is comparable to similar legal procedures in communities in which feuds still flourish and the central authority does not exercise very extensive political powers.

628 Intervention in a serious feud between two districts probably took the 643 form of the *reth* supporting one side against the other, and self-help, 692 sometimes back by the *reth*'s intervention, was possibly the means of obtaining compensation and settling disputes which were not willingly submitted by the two quarrelling parties to arbitration and the judgement of a court. On the other hand, a description of the settlement of a feud by Oyler suggests that the role of the *reth* is essentially that of peacemaker, but that his functions can only be exercised if the disputants are willing to make peace.(4) In this respect it would appear that the role of the *reth* is [771] comparable to that of other ritual and peacemaking functionaries among the Nilotes, such as the leopard-skin chief of the Nuer and the Dinka spear-chiefs.

(1) Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, 1925, p.157.
(2) *Ibid.*
(3) *Ibid.*, p.162.
(4) Oyler, *J.A.I.* 1930, Vol.III, No.3, pp.296-99.

8:Howell E-4,5 (1937, 1948) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SHILLUK OF THE UPPER NILE

CUSTOMARY LAW: MARRIAGE AND THE VIOLATION OF RIGHTS IN WOMEN

P. P. HOWELL

IN a previous article on the Shilluk[1] I discussed the laws of homicide and the legal and ritual functions of the *reth* or King. An interpretation of Shilluk law and authority is not easy because, apart from early contacts with the peoples of the northern Sudan, they have been subjected to external influences and some kind of Government since the early years of the last century. These contacts began with cursory and not altogether happy encounters with the Turco-Egyptian Government which were followed by the establishment of a provincial headquarters at Kodok in 1867 under the authority of a *mudir*; later came the turbulent and dismal years of the *Mahdia* and finally the occupation by the present Government in 1898. It would be idle to suppose that the political system of the Shilluk has remained unaffected by these influences. The Shilluk are by reputation an exceptionally conservative people and certainly the effects of their relations with outsiders are, to the casual observer, hard to detect. Profound changes have taken place none the less, especially in the sphere of customary law, and these changes are undoubtedly gathering momentum.

By 'law' I mean simply those customary rules governing human relationships from which there has developed a body of rules classed as 'customary law' (sometimes 'native law and custom') administered under the Chiefs' Court Ordinance of 1931, and more or less consistently applied in the tribunals established by the Government.

These courts have now largely taken the place of the ultimate sanction for conformity with accepted rules of conduct, for the fulfilment of recognized duties and the composition of all disputes, which was formerly the resort to force by the injured party and his supporters. It is my opinion that the ordered indigenous administrative system of the Shilluk, so enthusiastically described by some writers, and the organized repressive measures alleged to have been undertaken by the *reth*, are not only exaggerated, but also, in part, derive from contacts with alien governments. At any rate it is more than probable that no system existed among the Shilluk whereby all wrongs were righted by the direct intervention of the *reth* and his representatives.

We are not here concerned with political systems, but with the nature of customary law as it is applied today. This law is at basis derived from customary procedures in which arbitration and compromise prevailed; but in recent years it has acquired a consistency, and in some cases a rigidity, probably unknown in the past. A body of case law has arisen from precedents made in the courts, and although some laws may derive from the direct intervention of the Administration, others are part of a purely spontaneous process. It is also noticeable that many claims now upheld

[1] 'Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile: The laws of homicide and the legal functions of the *reth*.' *Africa*, xxii. 1, 1952. I am again indebted to the Sudan Government for permission to quote from official reports and to Mr. W. P. G. Thomson and Mr. J. L. Baker for comments and suggestions.

8:Howell E-4,5 (1937, 1948) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

in the courts are of a kind which in the past were mere matters of convention and usage and could not be defined as law even in the most extended definition of that term. The tendency is for the most intimate personal relationships to be governed by legal processes. This is a feature of the Nilotic world under the influence of modern administration which, while present among the Shilluk, is even more marked among Nuer and Dinka. There is a danger in this, because intervention in almost every sphere of human activity may tend to inhibit the normal readjustments which might otherwise naturally emerge to meet changing conditions. It is therefore all the more necessary to record something of present practice for comparison in later years.

The vast majority of cases which appear before the courts concern kinship obligations, marital relationships and the violation of rights in women. This article is therefore largely a description of the normal processes of marriage: the payment and distribution of bridewealth, divorce, and the infringement of legal rights in women. It is also in the nature of a commentary on previous articles published by Mr. M. E. C. Pumphrey and myself[1] on the subject of kinship and social organization among the Shilluk. From time to time reference is made to Nuer and Dinka institutions by way of comparison.[2] A few examples of actual disputes as heard and recorded in the Shilluk Courts are given in the text.

Shilluk Social Structure

Shilluk society is divided into 'provinces', 'divisions' (*lak*), and 'settlements' (*padi*). These are territorial and political segments, but it is really only the settlement which has any permanent political significance. Each settlement has a common territory, the boundaries of which run at approximately right angles to the river. Such territory includes a section of the highland ridge which runs roughly parallel to the Nile and on which the permanent dwelling-houses and cattle-byres are built; a section of the river front (*tuic*) which provides green grazing for the cattle when the river drops, and finally a more extensive section of the hinterland (*wak*) which is subjected to varying degrees of rain-flooding during the wet season but is dry and waterless for the rest of the year. Each type of land is essential for pastoral and agricultural activities according to the season, and the territorial segmentation of Shilluk country could not be arranged otherwise.

A settlement is an economic, political, and social unit, but is not a kinship unit since it contains representative lineages of several of the many Shilluk clans. Within the settlement there is, however, a tendency—not always effective for purely topographical reasons—for each lineage to occupy its own 'village'. Each village (*pur*) is made up of a number of 'hamlets' (also *pur*: pl. *myer*) which comprise several domestic units (*gol*), each such unit consisting of a group of dwelling-huts (*at*) occupied by a man, his wives, and children. The village is therefore also a kinship unit and, as a general rule, the closer the territorial proximity, the closer the kinship relationship. Clans (described by giving the name of the founder with the suffix *kwa*, meaning 'descendants of') are patrilineal descent groups which are theoretically exogamous, though separation in space, coupled with considerable distance of relationship within the kinship structure, may allow modifications of this rule. The

[1] *Sudan Notes and Records*, vol. xxiv, 1941.

[2] The reader may consult the works of Professor Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer. The Dinka are less well documented.

8:Howell E-4,5 (1937, 1948) 1953 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

lover is any less hard. In place of a recognised tribal fine or compensation he is now a victim of blackmail. The *nyirath* whom he is living with proceeds as follows 'Give me a cow or I will tell.' This may go on until the lover's capital is exhausted and the *nyirath* with her child or children moves off in search of further prey. The lover has no redress as the whole arrangement is outside tribal custom, and the *nyirath* prospers from her blackmail and promiscuity.[1]

I do not propose to discuss here the reasons for the bar against marriage or sexual intercourse with the daughters of reigning or former *reths*. I have sometimes heard Shilluk say that compensation for illicit intercourse with any woman of the royal clan should really go to the *reth*. There is, however, an obvious distinction between offences committed with daughters of *reths* and with other females of the royal clan. In the first case, all forms of sexual union are barred and any infringement of the rule is a crime against the *reth* himself and all he stands for. Moreover female *nyireths*, not being allowed to marry, are in a sense males. Hence sexual relationship with them by a male amounts to perversity and perversity is not a mere private delict but a spiritual offence likely to react upon society as a whole. Shilluk say that theoretically the *nyirath* and her lover should be put to death, but the offence is now compoundable by payment of a fine. The principles of punishment and expiation are involved, not merely restitution. In the case of all other female *kwareth*, the offence lies not in the fact of sexual relationship, but in an illicit relationship amounting to an infringement of rights which apply to all members of Shilluk society. The wrongdoer pays the indemnity in order to right that wrong. In accepting compensation for offences against other women of the royal clan the *reth* is acting as the recognized head of that clan and has a right to receive and redistribute (which in fact he usually does) the wealth which belongs to the clan collectively. The former is therefore more nearly a criminal or public offence, the sanctions being penal, while the latter is a private delict involving the restitutory sanction only. It is worth noting that a closer study of this subject might well lead to a clearer picture of the spiritual functions of the *reth* himself and through him of the royal clan, and also to a more reliable interpretation of his legal functions.

Conclusion

We may conclude by noting that Shilluk marriages have not the complexity, found both in the social processes and the transfer and distribution of bridewealth, which characterizes unions among their Nuer and Dinka neighbours. The principles are, however, comparable. Marriage is achieved by the performance of ceremonies which have both social and ritual aspects. Side by side with these ceremonies is the payment of bridewealth in cattle, goats, sheep, and sometimes cash. Neither is complete without the other and, generally speaking, each stage in the ceremonies is accompanied by further payments of cattle. The *wogho thiek*, the ultimate ceremony of marriage which corresponds approximately to the Nuer *mut* and the Dinka *thok de thiek*, at any rate in its legal implications, will not be performed unless sufficient cattle have already been paid to satisfy the kinsmen of the bride. Conversely, the payment of cattle would not legalize the union without the accompanying ceremonies.

[1] W. P. G. Thomson: unpublished records, 1946.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

traditional divisions of Shilluk country. From the early years of administration, with frequent minor adjustments, until 1949 these divisions were eleven in number,[1] but they were recently amalgamated to form five.

These historical factors have been summarized here to show how difficult it is to formulate definite conclusions on the *reth*'s political authority. According to tradition and to what the Shilluk will often themselves say, he has absolute powers of intervention to suppress public disturbances, to give judgement in certain disputes and, moreover, to execute those judgements. In fact, in recent years, and possibly at times during the latter half of the nineteenth century, this theoretical authority has had the backing of an alien government and may for this reason have been exaggerated beyond what was actually enforceable in earlier times. There is, therefore, throughout Shilluk history in the last hundred years a divergence of theory and fact, and one does not know how much of the theory has been created by external influences. It will be realized that this problem is also of some importance in a theoretical study of primitive legal systems, for we wish to know whether the laws were, in fact, enforceable, whether the Shilluk monarchy, apart from external influences, represents 'politically organized society,', and whether certain laws were enforced and legal sanctions applied in such a manner as to justify the use of the term 'public law'.

There is little evidence of legal procedures during the Turkish régime and none during the *Mahdia*. Schweinfurth writing, in 1868, a lucid account of a Shilluk dispute heard by the Turkish 'Mudir' or Governor at Fashoda, says: 'He (the Mudir) was continually being called upon to adjust the disputes of natives, who appealed to his judgement even in their most private concerns. . . .' After describing the unsuccessful plea of a Shilluk girl for permission to marry her lover who had not enough cattle to pay the bridewealth, he adds, 'This was not a very comforting decision, but it showed me plainly how that it was ever his rule to recognize the customs of the country'.[2] Schweinfurth also gives a vivid picture of the Shilluk king at this period.

> In the Mudir's verandah I also made acquaintance with a Shillook chief, who had entirely surrendered to the Egyptian Government, and was now, as the Governor expressed himself, 'coming to his senses.' There was no external indication whatever of his rank. . . . He retained now but a shadow of his former power; his better days were gone, days in which, attended by a council of ancestral state, he had swayed the sceptre of patriarchal dignity. Of all the negro races which occupy the entire district of the Nile, the Shillooks used to uphold the most perfectly regulated government. . . . But now this condition is all changed, and everything has disappeared which gave this independent and primitive people their most striking characteristics.[3]

There are, of course, other references to the indigenous administration of the Shilluk based on the division of the country into provinces and settlements with a representative of the *reth* in charge of each, and the *reth* himself as the ultimate authority. Many writers therefore assume that there existed a highly organized system; more highly organized than the evidence warrants. It is natural that the present

[1] See Howell and Thomson, op. cit., p. 6.

[2] Schweinfurth, G., *The Heart of Africa*, London, 1878.

[3] Schweinfurth, op. cit., p. 19. He is here referring to the Turkish puppet Ajang wad Nyidhok. He mentions later that 'Kaafir' (presumably Kwathket), another descendant of the ancient reigning family, still maintained himself as an 'uncrowned sovereign' in the southern part of the Shilluk country.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

some of the beasts are sacrificed during the ceremonies and others are added to their personal herds. One must, therefore, beg the question whether those portions alleged to be the right of the *reth* were ritual fees of this nature rather than 'fines' as is so frequently stated. It is a question of interpretation, and I suggest that even though repressive action and the exaction of 'fines' may have occurred, with the backing of foreign Governments, during the latter half of the last century and the early years of the present Administration, the payments were ritual in origin and concerned the *reth*'s ritual function in society. The use of the word 'fine' appears to me to be inaccurate.

Ritual of Purification for Homicide

As among other Nilotic peoples, a Shilluk who has killed another must perform certain rites to cleanse him from impurity which might otherwise affect his kinsmen. This process involves, first, the letting of blood, which is carried out by a magical expert (*ajwogo*)[1] who makes a small incision on his right shoulder with a spear. This is known as *tai dhuni*. Secondly, a small sacrifice is made (usually a sheep), the object of which is to remove the curse of the dead man's spirit. As among the Nuer and Dinka, the killer is not expected to eat or drink until this ritual has been performed.

Accidental Killing

Accidental killing (*agwoy*) is apparently not regarded as a serious offence among the Shilluk, especially if the two parties are connected by kinship or by close association in one territory. Hofmayr says: 'Accidental killing requires only the sacrifice of an ox at a peace ceremony and no more.'[2] District records indicate that two head of cattle sometimes were paid. At the Shilluk Chiefs' Council in 1934 it is recorded that 'the Council do not know whether there is a definite law on this subject or not. The *reth* says that years ago it was two head of cattle, one to the relatives of the dead man, one to the *reth*. He himself suggests two head of cattle to go to the deceased's family. This is confirmed as law.' I do not think that any such fixed indemnity existed in the past, but that intention was recognized and accident accepted in mitigation of the offence. At any rate the indignation of the deceased's kinsmen would not be so acute, and they would be prepared to accept an indemnity less than that normally demanded for intentional homicide.

Bodily Injuries not causing Death

On the subject of bodily injuries less than death, the evidence is even less reliable than on homicide. It is evident that such injuries require the payment of compensation if retaliatory action is not to follow. At the same time it is perhaps surprising that among the Shilluk, unlike the Nuer and Dinka, there are no recognized injuries for which compensation is given on a definite scale. We hear that 'for injury' an immediate payment of one bull must be made as a guarantee of good faith. Subsequent settlement is made on a scale regulated by the severity of the ultimate damage and rising, in the case of blinding, to the same rate as for death. Apart from the problem of the *reth*'s intervention in matters of this sort, it may be assumed, in the absence of

amounts to eight cattle out of a total of forty.

[1] *Ajwogo*: Magical expert or specialist. These persons are not comparable to the Nuer functionaries, such as the *kuar kuar*, but to the possessors of spirits (*yoon kwath*). *Ajwogo* is a derivative of *Juok*, meaning God in Shilluk.

[2] Op. cit.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1954 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

further evidence, that such offences were treated as private delicts in the past, though nowadays, through the influence of the Government, penal sanctions may be applied.

Witchcraft

The Dinka and Nuer tell us that witches and other anti-social persons were sometimes dispatched by their victims or their kinsmen with the tacit consent of the community. Acts of homicide against persons whose actions threatened the integrity of the community were either not subject to restitutory sanctions at all, or the compensation demanded by their kinsmen was on a much reduced scale.[1] A similar attitude towards witches is to be found among the Shilluk, but again without the support of actual examples.

In the published literature there are references to persons described variously as witches, sorcerers, magicians, medicine-men, and possessors of the evil eye,[2] and their activities and methods are described, but there are few references to the way in which they were treated. The sanction applied to witchcraft is normally counter magic consciously applied by the victim.

Hofmayr speaks of 'the *jal jur*, the evil-doer, his aim in life is to do harm, both to life and to property, either by natural means or others,' and adds that 'the *jal jur* works in the dark, but if he is caught, he will be severely punished. Often he is handed over to the people who kill him.' Hofmayr also speaks of the 'poison mixer' (again *jal jur*) who 'is hardly ever discovered. If he is caught, the people will lynch him on the spot and his relations will have to leave the district.'[3] Another passage mentions that the compensation for killing a person possessing the evil eye is only four head of cattle instead of ten. These references, supported by what the Shilluk have told me, suggest an attitude similar to that found among the Nuer and Dinka.

It might be expected that, if there were any greater development of concepts of public law, and if the *reth* performed formal judicial and executive functions, acts of this sort would be subject not to merely private retaliation with the consent of the community, but rather to repressive sanctions applied by the *reth* or his representatives. In fact there is no evidence of this. It may be noted in this connexion that there are instances recorded during the last thirty years of attempts to introduce alien cults which would clearly be subversive of the ritual status of the *reth* and, through him, of the religious foundations of Shilluk society. For this reason Shilluk who have openly practised the Dinka cult of Deng have been severely reproved.[4] There is good reason to believe that such activities would have been punished by death in the past and they are, by their very nature, public delicts amounting to acts of treason.

Conclusions

Much of the evidence so far quoted is unreliable, mainly because the authors have recorded impressions rather than facts. My own conversations with the Shilluk on the subject have been limited and perfunctory, and for this reason cannot provide

[1] For example, the Nuer *ruth* or Ghost - see Howell and Lewis, 'Nuer Ghosts - a Form of Witchcraft', *J.N.R.* xxviii, 1948.

[2] *ajwogo*, magician, *jal jur*, sorcerer, *jwok*, possessor of the evil eye. There are many references to the activities of such persons in Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*. See also Oyler, E. S., 'The Evil Medicine Man', *J.N.R.*, 1920.

[3] Hofmayr, *op. cit.*

[4] See Willis, C. A., 'The Cult of Deng', *J.N.R.*, vol. xi, p. 191.

9:Howell E-5 (1937-1950) 1952 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

a basis for definite conclusions. It is, however, probably safe to say that among the Shilluk homicide is a private delict requiring the restoration of equilibrium by the payment of compensation in cattle. The main object of such payments is to marry a wife into the kinship group of the deceased—rather than individually to the name of the deceased—and thus ensure its continuity and increase, which have been interrupted by the removal of one of its members. Retaliatory sanctions are also operative, in that the duty to take vengeance on the person of the killer or one of his kinsmen is recognized.[1] In principle, there are here no profound differences between the Shilluk and their Nuer and Dinka neighbours. The rate of compensation is governed by the relationship between the parties and thus the offence is subject to social range. Patricide and fratricide, regarded as the gravest possible offences against the integrity of the kinship group, are subject only to supernatural sanctions. These apply within the local lineage in lessening degree according to the relationship between the persons concerned, and the ritual expiation is known in Shilluk as '*cuala ji kipa reno*'.

We cannot, however, entirely ignore the strong tradition which prevails among the Shilluk and the views of early writers, that the *reth*, as ultimate authority, had the recognized power to intervene, to enforce such payments and, moreover, to exact additional payments in person and kind amounting to fines which he seized for himself. If we are to believe these traditions, we must conclude that public action against warring factions, whose continued enmity was disturbing the peace of Shilluk society as a whole, was sometimes undertaken. This does not, in my opinion, alter the argument that individual acts of homicide were treated as private delicts involving primarily the restoration of equilibrium between the units of society concerned. If, however, the portions alleged to have been taken regularly by the Shilluk *reth* are regarded as 'fines' paid to the head of the State (though in my opinion this is a wrong interpretation), then homicide among the Shilluk appears to be in a transitional stage between a private and a public delict, and was so even prior to the introduction of penal sections by the present Government.

[1] Pumphrey observes: 'It is interesting that where a compensatory payment for killing is due (in contrast to compensation for lesser wrongs) the net is cast wider and not only the lineage, but even members of other lineages of the same clan are expected to contribute.' Op. cit., p. 19.

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